

MCC Committee on Women's Concerns report

Report No. 62, July-August 1985

Mothers and Daughters

The older women, similarly, should be reverent in their bearing, not scandal-mongers or slaves to strong drink; they must set a high standard, and school the younger women to be loving wives and mothers, temperate, chaste, and kind, busy at home, respecting the authority of their own husbands. Thus the Gospel will not be brought into disrepute. (Titus 2:3-5)

Paul is telling Titus what advice he should give to different categories of people: older men, older women, and younger men. The older women are charged with the responsibility of teaching the younger women. Is such teaching happening in the 20th century with Mennonite and Brethren in Christ women? This issue of *Report* will explore the mother-daughter bond within the contemporary Mennonite and Brethren in Christ context by looking at the experiences of eight women.

This issue does not intend to present a detailed sociological analysis. Rather, it provides a forum for hearing some women's stories, for sharing experiences, in order to give you insight into your own experience with your mother and to encourage those who are raising daughters. None of these stories were easy to write. Almost all the writers testified to me that they wrote with great agonizing.

It would be nice if we could find more Biblical examples of mothers and daughters, but there is a paucity even of names that have been recorded due to the patriarchal family structure of those times. Three pairs can be identified: Jochebed and Miriam, Leah and Dinah, Lois and Eunice. The little we know about Jochebed and Miriam only makes us more curious. They were both courageous and seemed to have strong personalities to do what they did, so it would be easy to assume that Jochebed's influence on Miriam was positive and empowering.

Unfortunately, we know only about Leah's and Dinah's relationships with men and nothing about their relationship with each other. Dinah must have had sisters and half-sisters in that important family, but no

names are given. Lois and Eunice are both known for their faith and their Christian influence on their grandson and son, Timothy, despite his probably having a non-Christian father. Lois must have given Eunice a lot of spiritual support. It would be helpful if we had more examples from the Bible as well as more information about the three examples that have been preserved for us in Scripture.



The mother-daughter bond has only recently been examined in detail by psychologists and sociologists, among them Nancy Chodorow. She points out that all infants begin with a primary identification with the person responsible for their early care; in most cases this is the mother. After this phase there is the challenge of separation, distinguishing *self* from *other*. If the separation happens too soon (and this is more likely for boys who are perceived as *other*), the child loses a capacity for intimacy. Mothers identify with their daughters and are less likely to encourage them to separate, which has positive results in that the daughter has a greater capacity for "relatedness", but on the other hand the daughter can lack a clearly defined sense of self.

Chodorow laments the typical lack of participation by fathers in parenting. She states that this can make the mother-child relationship too intense, making the child too dependent on the mother, fearful of the mother and angry at the mother. The daughter sees the more aloof father as a symbol of autonomy and independence from the mother, but since he is not of her sex, he does not serve as a good model. (Thurman, pgs. 35-36).

The daughter's struggle for a separate identity and life pattern distinctive from her mother's can extend many years into her life. Lucy Fischer has pointed out (Fischer, pg. 621) that a key time for reconciliation occurs when the daughter's first child is born. Since many women today marry later (if at all) and childbearing is delayed, this opportunity for reconciliation comes later than it used to. Mothers and daughters thus experience a longer estrangement, and reconciliation may be more difficult to achieve. Nancy Friday (*My Mother/My Self*) writes out of the bitterness that arises from this lack of reconciliation. In contrast many women do reconcile with their mothers but may feel that something is wrong with them since close mother-daughter relationships are not currently seen as fashionable. (Baruch, pg. 605)

In the past, Mennonites and Brethren in Christ have emphasized separateness from the world. But this century's North American experience has been one of increasing assimilation, varying in degree from conference to conference and from region to region. Their separateness could mean that these Anabaptist women have experienced a different kind of parenting, and thus a different mother-daughter bond, than that experienced by other women. What can be said with more surety, however, in light of increasing assimilation into mainstream North America, is that the generation gap experienced by Mennonite and Brethren in Christ women and their mothers is greater than that experienced by their non-Mennonite and non-BIC contemporaries and, in many cases, greater than that experienced by their forebears. This makes the passage from Titus more difficult to put into practice. How can women teach their daughters how to cope with life when the daughter's experiences will be so different from those of the mother? Have Mennonite mothers been able to pass on relevant teachings to their daughters?

I am the oldest daughter of an oldest daughter of an oldest daughter. The women in this line illustrate some of the changes experienced by women in this century.

I come from a family of five children, my mother from a family of nine children. My grandmother was orphaned at age 3, when her father died in his 20's of typhoid fever and her mother died after childbirth, along with the infant brother. No longer is there so much danger in giving birth; no longer do our infants die in great numbers; no longer do we have families of nine or even five children.

My grandmother and great-grandmother's educations likely consisted of eight grades at a one-room country school, struggling with English because at home German was spoken. My mother learned English at home and went through grade 10. I've gone to college and graduate school. My great-grandmother and grandmother spent most of their lives in a Mennonite community, within a couple miles of most of their relatives. My mother has lived on three farms in two adjoining rural counties heavily settled by Mennonites. I've lived in eight locations in three countries, mostly urban settings with only sparse Mennonite populations and far from relatives.

My grandmother and mother did not work outside the home. I've worked outside the home except for three years when my children were very small, including through much of two pregnancies. My mother and grandmother's church involvement was more limited in reality and in expectation than mine is. My lifestyle contrasts more sharply with my mother's than hers does with her mother's. Many Mennonite and Brethren in Christ women are in similar situations.

My mother and I are very different. Her life seems simple compared to mine. Earlier I wished for a more "complicated" mother, one who had gone through more experiences, who could identify better with me. Now, however, I realize that what she gave me was very valuable. Her strongest teachings have been the nonverbal ones, ones teaching attitudes, rather than what to do in a specific situation, such as how soon to go back to work after giving birth.

Several "teachings" come to mind as things I've learned from my mother and which are now mine. (1) The idea of living peacefully with others in the immediate environment and in the world is one I don't remember learning, so it must have been one I learned as a very young child from my mother (and father). Not remaining angry, not hurting others, not letting violence escalate seem innate. (2) My mother is a very practical type. She doesn't go along with luxuries or non-necessities or throwing away things which could be of use. I'm much the same. As most women I learned how to do housework from my mother, but along with learning those skills came a more-with-less attitude. After reading Doris Longacre's two more-with-less books, I realize the common Mennonite heritage in this area. Combining thriftiness with generosity is as relevant in our crowded world with its unequal distribution of wealth as it was in more rural times. (3) It has taken me years to realize why I couldn't really identify with other feminists in their anger against some of the men in their lives and their anger with the patriarchal system. I've grown up in a non-hierarchical family, where my mother and father modelled mutuality, complementary roles and respect. I never saw them argue or quar-

rel. At the time, I didn't realize this uniqueness and strength. I just knew that there is a falseness and unfairness in the patriarchal system that I couldn't tolerate. (4) The Anabaptist teaching of nonconformity was a way of life in our home. This was supported, of course, by living in a Mennonite community, but the belief was not a superficial one. I can't remember any specific words my mother used, but it just was a part of our life not to identify with secular culture. I see this emphasis of my mother as part of her overall integration of faith and life, the idea that what you believe is the basis for how you act.

Above all, my mother has given me "room" or space, in contrast to exercising tight control. Perhaps this is easier to do in a big family. "Room", combined with trust in the children's capabilities to make good decisions, all in the context of love, was the model in our home. I'm trying to follow this same model as a mother of growing children. My actions as a parent have been influenced more by this model than by all the books on childrearing I've read. My mother shows love and appreciation for all her children and grandchildren, and it extends to

others in the community, but it is a love without the need to control, without judgement, with the acceptance of different individuals with different needs.

Although my mother's life and mine have gone in different directions, and there is a gulf between what we have experienced, we have many similarities in how we look at life and relate to others. I am very much at home on our once-a-year holidays sitting in her kitchen and just talking to her. Her influence has been relevant, helpful, and strengthening to me. —Janice Kreider

Janice Kreider has just completed a three-year term on the Committee on Women's Concerns. She is a librarian at the University of British Columbia and lives in Vancouver, B.C. with her husband, J. Evan, and sons, Matthew, 12, and Aaron, 10. Her mother, Anna Stuckey Aeschliman, lives with her husband, Hyrthal, on their farm near Stryker, Ohio. She is a member of the Pine Grove Mennonite Church. Her five children are all married.

What's There to Say?

by Rhoda Imhoff

The expression "What's there to say," is usually accompanied by a sigh or a shrug of the shoulder. Often neither a question nor a statement, the cliché implies nothing can be done, the situation just is, the condition is universal. When used, assumptions are made that generation after generation will repeat the same mistakes, that the gulf or the chasm between persons of different ages will never be filled, and that reasonable persons give in or don't bang their heads against the inevitable. Although "What's there to say" symbolizes the belief in the generation gap, exceptions to the rule are expected such as the case of a mother-daughter relationship. So, to test the possibility that some meaningful words can be said about a 72-year-old mother and 43-year-old daughter, this essay will contrast my mother's ideas about work with mine.

The minimum physical facts of our lives are an extreme contrast because of the obvious difference in age. At 43, my mother was a homemaker with an eighth-grade education. She spent her days preparing or storing food and caring for her seven children, the oldest 16 and the youngest 2. She never ate a meal in a restaurant; she socialized only on Sunday and Wednesday evenings at the church. Her favorite possession was the new kitchen table in the south addition to the house. She depended on her teacher-farmer husband to decide and provide everything. She lived on a 70-acre farm in central Ohio where the whole county population numbered 43,000.

On the other hand, I, at 43, am in my 17th year as a school administrator, with a Ph.D. I spend my days and evenings managing 130 teachers and my dinner hours caring for my two children, ages 16 and 17. I count on restaurant meals to get the family through the busiest weeks; I socialize mostly at work, seldom on Sunday mornings at church, and never on Sunday

or Wednesday evenings since there are no services then. My favorite possession is my Macintosh computer. My administrator husband and I jointly plan, provide, and make decisions. We live in a three-bedroom home in a Denver suburb where the population tips the 1.6 million mark. In short, my mother at 43 was rural folk; I am an urbanized feminist.

Now that the basic facts are laid out, what's there to say about work? My mother's work was a fight against, an attack on the environment. She shoveled the garden, tore out weeds, cut down the cornstalks, burned the pickle vines, chopped off the heads of chickens, pulled their feathers out, singed their skin hairs, jammed the clothes through the wringer, shoveled coal onto the fire, combed the girls' hair, and fried the eggs and potatoes. She channeled her aggressive energies by mastering, controlling, reforming, organizing, directing everything in sight to make things pleasant for herself and her children. By destroying the enemy (dirt) and conquering want (too little food), she filled years with work. She seemed to have no aversion to the day-after-day necessary tasks, the drudgery of repeated acts. The monotony, sense of isolation and lack of adult companionship weren't mentioned since every day some tangible results of her efforts were evident. There was a certain sentimental, sacrificial halo surrounding her labor. Her work was unending.

And what satisfactions did my mother seem to find? The products of her labors included her home and the provisions in it, her husband, and most importantly her children. She got her signals of approval of how she was doing from her husband's words and her children's achievements. She spent a long time practicing self-discipline, she was tenacious and persisted in applying her efforts, she complied with the demands of necessity, and she learned to live without much introspection by complete absorption in her work.

Only when the children, husband, and the necessity to grow and store her own food were gone—only then surfaced her inability to find a different way to express aggression. Stripped of the nurturing role, she lacked a defined objective, a project to create. Without an arena left to release her destructive instinct, she gradually started to feel the effect of accumulated resentment about the overwork of those homemaking years. When mothering stopped, the rage that she formerly controlled through work turned into a destructive force she unleashed upon herself. She communicated this suffering through depression, physical ills, self-effacement, and self-abnegation. She perceived herself as not useful anymore.

Like my mother, my work is destructive energy applied to a constructive goal. Yet there are differences. My work is a fight against, an attack on a social system. I channel my aggressive energies by mastering the schedules of 130 teachers, controlling a budget of \$156,000, writing a 9th-grade economic curriculum, organizing a process to set school goals for the next five years, directing everything at the office to make things pleasant for myself and the 2,300 students attending the school. By destroying the enemy (non-achievement) and conquering instructional sloppiness (poor teaching), I fill my years with paper shuffle, classroom observations, supervision conferences, and committee work. I enjoy the challenge of meeting the needs of the building each day. In fact, I am usually exhilarated by days of many crises. I am never alone, for adult co-workers are always just a hall away. There is a certain status and feeling of importance to my labors.

And what satisfactions do I find? I imagine that the products of my efforts ultimately touch the students. On my best days I think they do. I get my signals of approval from the testimonials of parents on how their children liked learning from a particular teacher. I save my appraisals from the building principal to use as ammunition to gain the next promotion. I get pleasure

when I sense appreciation from the teachers; and I experience relief that I have stimulating activity to fill every waking hour. As long as teachers ask me to help order books, observe their classrooms, and mediate angry parent conferences, I am needed. I am good at my profession, for I have been a long time educating for the role and a long time practicing my art. I have learned to live with the institutional maxim, "If you retire tomorrow, they will have appointed a replacement today."

Ten years from now when I may retire from education, will there surface then my ability to find a new area to exercise impulses toward mastery, a way to achieve something of worth without trampling, being hurtful, showing wanton destructiveness toward others or myself? Without my administrative arena left to release my creative instincts, will I gradually resent the mountains of papers I wrote? Stripped of my supervisory-coaching role, will I lack a defined objective, a project to create? What then will I try to do in my rage against the final cessation of work—death?

What there was to say about work was exactly "What's there to say," accompanied by both a sigh and a shrug of the shoulders. The plot of my generation hasn't been altered drastically from that of the generation before. True, the backdrop changed from country to city and the props are on a much grander scale. Yet, the middle-aged actress is still the stand-in for the aged one. And only when I am 72 will I know whether I have ad-libbed a few more lines or not. Who's there to say except me?

Rhoda Imhoff is an assistant principal for instruction at a large inner-city high school in Denver, Colorado. She is married to Ralph and they have two daughters, Morgan and Roseyn. Her congregation is the First Mennonite Church in Denver. Her mother, Delphine Berg Amstutz, recently sold her family home and moved to a retirement home in Walnut Creek, Ohio.

Pieces of Light

by Peggy Funk Voth

Late morning sunlight slanted over my shoulder as I ripped open the envelope from my mother. Inside were articles dealing with the topic of the gifted child. I hoped to find help in coping with an intense, overbearing preschooler. As my eyes scanned through the typical characteristics of the gifted child, I began to feel uneasy inside. Then as the article spoke of the problems gifted children often face, how they are viewed by others, the social difficulties they encounter, the impatience they feel toward the discussions and activities of their peers, a lump blocked my throat. I identified with so much of what was being said. I wept as I read about the needs of the gifted child and how those needs can be met. The articles described all too well my childhood and my experience with school and peers. Two decades after the agony of being misunderstood and often lonely, I realized others also failed to fit in easily. More important, I saw that there was nothing inherently "wrong" with me.

The rejection I felt all through my school years flooded back into my memory and its pain resurfaced. I was angered at the suffering and wished I had been recognized for who I was. I felt I had been cheated out of my own potential during a large period of my life. At the same time I experienced relief that at last I understood my struggle. I was glad that now it was becoming at least somewhat acceptable to be the kind of person I was.

A few months later as I visited with a teacher of gifted children who also knew my mother, she remarked, "Your mother is a gifted person whose development has not been fostered." I sat stunned, staring out the window at the bright afternoon sunlight. Of course! Many things fit: her flowing creativity, her lifelong frustration with the never-ending but necessary mundanities of life, her surprising resourcefulness, her zest for doing things well and her sensitivity to others. To me she had often seemed a dynamic person whose world was small, con-

sisting of the 160 acres we owned, her four children and her husband.

I liked my mother and as I reflected on her life, I felt a sense of loss. She too had been treated as just one of the crowd. In my eyes she had even been misunderstood and judged harshly. She had often been treated as one with no promising potential. Even worse, she seemed to view herself that way during my childhood. Education was a waste if invested in a female, and an occupation was unnecessary for her. Furthermore, the church exploited the energy, dependability and warmth she gave so willingly. What she accomplished was seen as one's Christian duty. She was not openly affirmed or encouraged to develop her gifts, and she certainly was not remunerated for her work. Yet the functions she performed were absolutely vital to the life of her church.

Now, as I recognized my own uniqueness and tried to understand my son, I saw my mother as a living witness to the fact that who one is cannot be forever hidden, cannot be easily extinguished.

My mother entered the work force for the first time when she was in her mid-40's. Through her library work she has sharpened her interrelational skills and has found an outlet for her creativity and her love of books and people. Many people know her and admire her.

Although her diligence and initiative have led to an increased library usage in her small town, her pay remains that of an uneducated worker.

My mother's survival is what encourages me. Pushed from the inside by a yearning and ability to do certain things which are not always accepted when performed by a woman, I am nonetheless pursuing the development of those areas. Though I feel the church is slow to accept me fully, though I delayed obtaining the education I have always desired, though I am sometimes misunderstood and criticized, I have seen someone who is important to me follow her inner urgings enough to find a life that is satisfying to her, in spite of educational and occupational deprivation. Like my mother, I want to live fully as a person in my own uniqueness. Like my mother, I want to live at peace with myself.

Peggy Voth, 38, lives with her husband Dennis and two boys, ages 9 and 6, in Ft. McMurray, Alberta. While nurturing long-range plans of attending seminary, Peggy is developing experience and confidence in her leadership abilities through World Book's management development program. Peggy's mother, Esther Funk, lives in Lehigh, Kansas, with her husband Harry. She is the mother of four children and nine grandchildren.

"My lifestyle contrasts more sharply with my mother's than hers does with her mother's. Many Mennonite and Brethren in Christ women are in similar situations."



Russian Mother/Canadian Daughter

by Gerda Krause

My mother was born and raised in post-revolutionary Russia. Most of the stories she tells of her early years are full of fun and laughter but it was certainly a hard life. Food was often scarce. When she was 11, the secret police arrested her father on false charges. She never saw him again. A world war interrupted her education at grade eight and she spent much of her youth as a refugee, separated from her family, working on German farms and in cities, including Dresden during the terrible bombing raid.

When she came to Canada, she supported herself and her mother by cleaning houses during the winter and picking berries and hops during the summer. After she married and had children, she continued with this on a part-time basis to supplement the family income.

Her story is not unusual. Many of the Mennonite women in our western Canadian churches have similar ones to tell. Their experiences have made them a generation of strong, hardworking women with a firm faith in God. These characteristics certainly describe my mother. But unlike many of her peers, she is also a feminist.

She probably wouldn't acknowledge the title, but she is a strong advocate for the equality of men and women and for the expanding role of women, not only in the world but also in the church. At a time when most of my friends' mothers were encouraging them to go to Bible school to find a good Christian husband, my mother was stressing to me the importance of education and finding a career that I would enjoy. She insisted that being female should not deter me in my choice of career and stressed that if God had given me certain gifts, it was my responsibility to Him to develop and use those gifts to their fullest. She saw the value of education despite the fact that (or perhaps because) she had obtained so little herself and was convinced that a woman could have a career as well as a family. She also felt that the career should be a source of joy and satisfaction, not just a source of income.

When I married at 20, I knew she was worried that I would leave school. There were people who told me that I was wasting time and effort since I would soon have to quit work to have children. Others warned me of the dangers of a worldly university and the unChris-

tian ideas I would pick up. But my mother's teachings had taken root and I finished my degree and went on to graduate school.

All this time, my mother was my greatest supporter, encouraging me, prodding me on when I felt lonely and lost as the first and only graduate student in my circle of friends, or when it seemed that there would be no job prospects at the end of all that work. Of course, the encouragement was not always appreciated. I was often angry and even resentful, feeling that she was pushing me to do something she couldn't do herself. But as usual, she turned out to be right. Soon after I finished, I found a teaching position at a local college, which is a source of great joy and satisfaction to me. I work with interesting people, am teaching a subject I love and, best of all, am constantly learning new things.

And still my mother supports me. She has encouraged me to use my gifts and training for the service of God and the church. It is no coincidence that in our rather conservative congregation where women are very rarely seen behind the pulpit, my sister and I are among the few women that have been asked to preach. She has encouraged me to take positions in the church and to work on committees. All this has greatly enriched my life and my faith.

And beginning last summer, when I had my first child, her help and encouragement passed all bounds of duty. She has enthusiastically taken on the care of my son while I'm at work, making it possible for me to enjoy both a career and a family without the guilt so often experienced by working mothers. For rather than feeling that I am abandoning my child for part of each day, I know that I am offering him the opportunity to experience the love, wisdom and laughter that helped me to grow up. He's a lucky little boy.

Gerda Krause, age 32, is married to Eric, has a 1-year-old son, attends the Sherbrooke Mennonite Church in Vancouver, B.C., and teaches biology (the subject in which her mother was interested before the war stopped her schooling) at Langara College in Vancouver. Her mother, Annie (Thiessen) Schultz and father, Sigmund, have four children, the youngest of whom is still at home.

Missionary Daughter

by Elaine Miller Haines

My mother, née Vesta Nafziger, travelled to India in 1938 as a single person with a missionary career before her. Nearly three years later her fiancé, Paul Miller, joined her in India and they were married immediately—something that must have called for much courage and even some reckless abandon. Stationed in the Dhamtari area of Madhya Pradesh, my parents' first priority was serving God in the variety of ministries that were a part of mission work in those days. A world war was raging and mission work was in its heyday.

I was their firstborn and my earliest memories were of my mother balancing the roles of missionary and mother. She was active in educational work in the church, and her mothering included managing a staff of household servants, among them the "ayas" entrusted with my care and that of my brother and sister who came along later. Because of her missionary responsibilities, Mother had to share mothering with the ayas for whom we children developed a very real closeness and then later with the boarding school teachers and

matrons. I have often rejoiced as a second-generation missionary that I have not had to share the joy of mothering with a staff and that I have been free to concentrate on being mother and wife and free, too, to minister in my home to those persons whom God brought my way.

"During our first term overseas, our two daughters were born and my appreciation bordered on awe for Mother's coping with multiple roles, primitive conditions and missionary expectations."

During our first term overseas, our two daughters were born and my appreciation bordered on awe for Mother's coping with multiple roles, primitive conditions, and missionary expectations. My parents did all they could to give us children a feeling of security and warmth. Family prayers and meal times were near sacred events in our lives. My preschool years in an Indian village were idyllic. Though Mother and Dad had many responsibilities, my world was small and secure. Then at the age of 7, like other missionary kids, I entered boarding school over 1000 miles from home and I had to grow up fast. The pain and loneliness I experienced were ameliorated by the excitement of travel and being with peers, but for Mother the separation must have been traumatic. As I gave Kristina's seventh birthday party in Nazareth, it dawned on me with new force what the cost must have been for Mother (and Daddy, too) as they left us kids in boarding school. Most surely their love for Christ and obedience to His call sustained them during those times.

Mother was a courageous, adventurous person for her day, being one of the first to leave the security of Archbold, Ohio to go off to college and then on to India for a seven-year first term that stretched to nearly a decade. Her resourcefulness in managing with war-time rations, even once making underwear for us from an old parachute, her creativity in writing Sunday school materials for the Indian church and her appreciation for beauty as she always had flowers in the house—these are only a few of her gifts to me. She was committed to serving a church that was becoming rooted in the soil of India and she remained over the years very involved in the work of the mission as more and more the Indians assumed responsibility for their own life and witness.

From my perspective, there have been times when I have felt that I lacked the model I needed as mother and wife because so much of my time was spent in boarding school. I have often pondered the roots of my own insecurities in light of responsibility and independence being thrust upon me at an early age.

I am now in what is without doubt the most emotionally shattering period of my life. I have been able to serve in an overseas setting while having my children close to me. Most of my energy and time has been spent

helping them grow and mature. Now they are leaving home and I am going through what my mother must have experienced many times over beginning with my first entry into boarding school. I am asking myself: Have I adequately prepared my children to move into adulthood in a culture in which they have not grown up? Have I modelled the roles of mother and wife that they will need? Have I nurtured faith that is strong enough to stand when storms and changes come into their lives? With all my limitations and failures, have I been faithful to God's call to me as a mother and His servant?

As we write (and my husband has been helping me), we are taking leave of Israel, a decision not a little influenced by my own experiences. Joe and I feel that we need to be available to our children as they make the adjustments and meet the challenges before them.

"I am now in what is without doubt the most emotionally shattering period of my life. Most of my energy and time has been spent helping the children grow and mature. Now they are leaving home and I am going through what my mother must have experienced many times over..."

I am torn between the pain of having to pull up roots here in the Middle East and the joy of knowing there are new beginnings awaiting me.

And so I celebrate—

- the example of a courageous, loving mother,
- the privileges and the struggles of having grown up as a missionary kid,
- the faithfulness of God to my parents as they lived with the tensions between their roles as missionaries and parents to us in a very different day and place. His grace has been abundant.

And I confess—

- my sense of insecurity as the familiar roles of mother and missionary undergo metamorphosis,
- my frustration with the pace at which changes are coming,
- my sadness at having been geographically separated from Mother for most of our lives and my joy at perhaps more time to be together in the near future,

And I pray—

- for my parents who, in retirement, reflect on their years in mission,
- for my children as they move out of the nest and begin to fly,
- for my husband and myself as we accept the "changes that are sure to come."

Born in India 43 years ago, Elaine Miller Haines is mother of three children: Kristina (19), Kimberly (17), and Matthew (14). She with her husband, Joe, served with MCC from 1965-1969 in Jordan and since 1972 in Israel with the Mennonite Board of Missions. Her mother is Vesta Miller, who with Paul, is retired after over 45 years in India and now living in Goshen, Indiana.

On Mothering My Mother

by Bev Suderman

I was studying in West Germany at the time—one year at a foreign university to complete an undergraduate degree. During the two-month break between winter and summer semesters, my parents, neither of whom had ever been to Europe, decided to come for three weeks of travel. Letters and phone calls flew across the Atlantic as we planned our trip: should we rent a car? how much luggage should we bring? which countries should we visit? what would the weather be like? Their questions were endless and I began to feel the first inkling of the responsibility which would be mine for my mother and father during our three weeks on the road. As the one living in Europe and thus the one familiar with the language, the customs, the transportation system, the food, the accommodations (the list seemed endless), I was obviously going to be in charge. In short, I would be parenting my parents, and most strangely of all, mothering my mother.

It began as soon as they stepped off the plane and cleared customs. “Bev, have you got some Dutch money? I’d like a cup of coffee.” “Bev, where are the washrooms here?” “Bev, where’s a good place to eat/to stay the night/to shop/to sightsee?” And thus our three weeks progressed. I was usually the leader and they the followers. Translation: I was the parent; my parents were the children. And like all children, on occasion they rebelled: “No, we don’t want to go to another museum.” “Bev, don’t walk so fast, I can’t keep up.”

It was a strange role; certainly we all discussed the alternatives and made the decisions together, but nonetheless, it was I who was essentially responsible for whatever we did. “Whatever you think best, Bev.” “You decide, Bev.” And I began to realize what it might be like 25 years or so down the road, when I would be near 50 and my mother in her 70’s. In all likelihood, I would be the caregiver, the decision-maker, the responsible one, and my mother would be the recipient.

These three weeks were the future in microcosm. And it would be as strange then as it was during our travels. The woman on whom I once depended for food and drink looking to me during those three weeks to recommend a restaurant; the woman who had sewn my clothes and knitted my sweaters asked me where the fabric stores were; the woman who had rocked my crib when I was a fretful baby waited for me to select our accommodations. Many of the things which my mother had once done for

me, her daughter, I was, for that short time, doing for her. It was an experience which led me to realize how strange it must be for my mother to care for her own aging mother, now in her 70’s, who has become increasingly dependent on her children for decisions and help in money matters, living arrangements, travel, etc. In my own memory, my grandmother has always been dependent to some degree on her children and thus the present situation of increased dependence is nothing startling for me. It is, however, a potentially difficult situation for my mother and her siblings.

And so it is almost normal for my mother to be caring for her mother. But my mother herself is a strong, creative and independent woman whose vigor and talents are increasing as she nears 50. My own respect for, and even reliance on her opinions and judgment have increased in the last few years. What will happen if the time comes when she will be dependent on me? And what happens if she needs my attention and I’ve made my home on the other side of the country? My grandmother is from the last generation that is likely to have her children and their families all around her in close geographical proximity; nine of her 10 children live within 16 kilometres of her tiny apartment. My two siblings and I may well scatter permanently.

Mothering my mother during those three weeks of travel in Europe was a strange interlude in my year in Germany. Mothering my mother in 25 years is a prospect not without its worries. I hope that her own gifts of endurance, strength and creative coping will have been passed on to me and help me to be a good mother to my mother.

Bev Suderman is presently an archives assistant at the Mennonite Heritage Centre in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Besides the year of studies in Germany, she has studied at the University of Manitoba and the Canadian Mennonite Bible College. Meg Suderman, her mother, farms with her husband near Winkler, Manitoba, coordinates the SELFHELP Crafts section of the Winkler MCC Thrift Shop and has a strong interest in knitting and quilting. She has two other children, a son and a daughter.

Motherhood: Changing and Growing

by Mary Regehr

My mother died just over three years ago. Memories are still strong. I was the fourth child in a family of eight. I have one sister and six brothers. It seems to me that Mother very seldom deliberately set out to “teach” us a specific lesson or skill. We learned from family living, from observing, feeling, experiencing.

During the Depression, Mother was out working in the orchards of southern Ontario, and left me, at ages

10 and 11, at home looking after my three younger brothers (one was 7 and the twins were not yet 3). I do not recall being “taught” how to do that. It was a necessity, and I did it.

As I think about my own two daughters (who will both be married before this year is out), I recognize that, in respect to teaching, things were much the same. I did not teach them how to make perogies, yet one

daughter called just a few weeks ago and announced, "Mom, I'm making perogies!" "Did you get the recipe from your mother-in-law?" I inquired. "No, from Hunky Bill's Perogie Maker." She learned to make perogies when she decided she wanted to. She didn't need me for that.

I didn't work outside the home until my children were in high school; for all my availability, my daughters were not interested in having me "teach" them how to cook, or clean, or sew, or knit, except in brief experimental spurts. Yet Jenny sews beautifully and imaginatively, and Lorie is an excellent, creative cook and a warm hostess. Did they learn these arts from me? By example, perhaps, but much more by making a decision and turning their mind to executing it.

I am aware of much that is written about daughters responding and/or reacting to the pattern set by their mothers. My daughters have done both, and will probably continue to do so. This is as it should be; they are not created in my image. What they have seen and heard from me will, of course, always be present with them. They have seen life as we lived it, and how they experienced life with us will certainly be reflected in how they will live as wives and as mothers. But their learning will come as they make decisions about whether or not to follow my ways.

When Lorie was a teenager, she once spouted, "I'm so much like you, Mom, it makes me sick." I chose to hear both the negative and the positive in that statement. Jenny said recently, "I'm doing things around the house, and it strikes me again and again—that's just how Mom does it." Quite clearly the teaching has happened in more subtle ways, but is not for that reason less effective. Indeed, probably for that very reason it is more profound and enduring. I therefore continue to influence my daughters in very significant ways.

Lorie and Jenny have both embraced the Christian faith. I give thanks to God for that. I believe that here, too, it was our modelling more than our explicit teaching that helped them to make that choice. They had in some

ways said "no" first, and thus could make the "yes" their own, almost like unlearning and relearning at a deeper level.

On our return to Winnipeg after a sabbatical leave, one woman said to me, "Well, with Lorie getting married soon, and Jenny already married, you are finished now." No, no, I am not finished! And not only because through our past relationship I continue to influence them. There is more. Now that they and I can recognize that influence and can talk about it, they are open to my reinforcement or correction of that influence.

At the same time, of course, I must maintain a "hands-off" stance now that they are grown. Influence, yes, but now, as then, my "teaching" will not be by five-step lessons. They will continue to observe me as I relate to them, to their families, and to God, and at lesser levels, as I manage our home and the kitchen. They will observe and learn.

On the evening before her wedding day, Jenny and I spent a very precious time together sharing and praying. I expect to experience this again with Lorie. After the necessary distancing of the teen years, I feel reconciled with my daughters. I know that the birth of a baby is to affect this, and, though that event will be very special for me (as it was in the case of my two sons), I am glad that I do not have to wait until then to recover the bonding and warmth. From this relational base, teaching and learning now become reciprocal. That is both freeing and delightful.

Mary Regehr, a current Winnipeg resident, was born in Russia and came to Canada in 1925 when she was 5 months old. She received a master's degree in educational psychology in 1983. She now works as a counselor, both independently and with her husband, John, and leads seminars, workshops and retreats. Their four children (three of whom were adopted) are all married, and they have three grandchildren. Her mother was Maria Goertzen Unger (1897-1983), who had eight children and lived in southern Russia, Mexico, southern Manitoba, and Leamington, Ontario.

A Daughter's Inheritance

by Ruth Teichroeb

My mother could converse with anyone, anywhere. As a child, I observed her gregarious personality with both admiration and impatience, depending on the circumstances.

After church on Sundays, as the last few cars pulled out of the parking lot and Mom was nowhere in sight, I would be nominated by my brothers to retrieve her. I knew I would find her in animated conversation with someone and I became an expert at intervening on behalf of her restless family.

At the grocery store she knew the manager and the checkout clerks by name. When she hung up wash in the back yard, she would inevitably end up chatting with a neighbor over the fence. When we went camping as a family, a common occurrence was to "lose Mom", meaning that somewhere along the row of campsites she had met someone interesting and wouldn't be back

for awhile. She often returned with playmates for my brothers and me—who were less adventurous with strangers.

Mother made friends easily. Her curiosity and compassion resulted in a network of relationships which extended from our neighborhood to the church and community. I grew up knowing that close friendships are as essential for the spirit as physical nourishment is for the body.

As far back as I can remember, my mother taught Sunday school and sang soprano in the church choir. When she sang solos during the worship service, I would smile up at her from my church bench, remembering stories about how her parents had scraped money together during the Depression to give her music lessons. Their sacrifice was rewarded when she sang.

I have memories of waking up to the sound of her

singing to herself in the morning. Unlike me, she was a "morning person" and woke up happy. While doing dishes or housework, she would put on a favorite Mahalia Jackson record or a Rogers and Hammerstein musical and liven up her tasks by singing along, a habit that I have since adopted.

When I was born in 1956, my mother quit her job as a teacher. In the 1950's motherhood meant giving up a career outside the home. I was followed in quick succession by two younger brothers.

Over the next dozen years, my mother did substitute teaching and various volunteer jobs, but her primary responsibilities were at home. She believed it was important to be available to us during our growing-up years, and to be supportive to my father's career as a business education teacher.

Yet there was a strong undercurrent of frustration with the limitations of her roles as wife and mother. Domestic pursuits like sewing or cooking or gardening, which have often provided creative outlets for women, didn't hold any fascination for her beyond the necessity of keeping us fed and clothed and content. Sometimes we teased her about "not being like other mothers" who were satisfied with their traditional roles. As I got older I became more aware of the tension she felt between her desire to return to teaching and her commitments at home.

While I rode the emotional roller coaster of teenagehood, my mother was experiencing the difficulties of re-entering the job market at middle age. After several years of unsuccessful and discouraging job hunting, she was hired as a part-time special education teacher and returned to university to upgrade her teaching credentials.

By the fall of 1974, I was 18 and living away from home for the first time in voluntary service in Indiana. Her letters to me that year were filled with stories of her students, and it was obvious she was thriving on the long-awaited challenges of teaching. The next year

she was offered a full-time special education class. Just days before she was to begin her first full-time job in years, she died very suddenly of an aneurysm in August 1975.

I have now lived a third of my life without my mother. At every stage of my life there is a different sense of loss, another kind of grieving to do at not having her in my life.

As my mother's daughter, I identified closely with her struggles to fit into a traditional female role. I read feminist literature that eloquently described my observations that something was not right. Like many daughters, I was determined not to repeat my mother's mistakes. For awhile I resolved to avoid both marriage and children in order to keep from being trapped.

Age and experience have mellowed me. I have realized that neither marriage nor children are themselves the culprits. I have discovered alternatives to an either/or approach to career and family. I cannot imagine giving up my vocation, which challenges me to use my gifts, or my marriage, which is a loving partnership that sustains me through the ups and downs of life.

Over the past 10 years, I have come to appreciate the gifts my mother gave me. She believed in my unique abilities and encouraged me to use them. She nurtured my creativity in music and writing and was always there to share the triumphs and failures. She taught me by her example that women can be strong, independent and compassionate. And most of all, she gave me the gift of her struggle to be true to herself—a gift I will never forget.

Ruth Teichroeb was, until recently, on staff with Mennonite Voluntary Service in Winnipeg, but as of the fall of 1985 is a journalism student at Carleton University in Ottawa. She is married to Dwight Scott. Her mother was Phyllis Plummer Teichroeb (1932-1975) of Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario.

For Further Reading

Baruch, Grace and Rosalind C. Barnett. Adult Daughters' Relationships with Their Mothers. *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 45 (3): 601-606. August 1983.

Chodorow, Nancy. *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*. University of California Press. 1978.

Cohler, Bertram J. and Henry U. Grunebaum. *Mothers, Grandmothers, and Daughters: Personality and Childcare in Three-Generation Families*. Wiley. 1981.

Day, Ingeborg. Daughters and Mothers. *MS* 3 (12): 49-53, 78-83. June 1975.

Fischer, Lucy Rose. Transitions in the Mother-Daughter Relationship. *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 43 (3): 613-622. August 1981.

Friday, Nancy. *My Mother/My Self: The Daughter's Search for Identity*. Delacorte Press. 1977.

Hirsch, Marianne. Mothers and Daughters. *Signs* 7 (1): 200-222. Autumn 1981.

Kahn, Diana Grossman. Lessons of their Mother's Lives: Imitation and Avoidance by Contemporary College Women. *International Journal of Women's Studies* 5 (1): 58-74. January/February 1982.

Koppelman, Susan, ed. *Between Mothers and Daughters: Stories Across a Generation*. The Feminist Press. 1985.

Olsen, Tillie, ed. *Mother to Daughter, Daughter to Mother, Mothers on Mothering: A Daybook and Reader*. The Feminist Press. 1984.

Pildes, Judith. Mothers and Daughters: Understanding the Roles. *Frontiers* 3 (2): 1-11. 1978.

Rich, Adrienne. *Of Woman Born*. W.W. Norton. 1976.

Rich, Elaine Sommers. *Mennonite Women*. Herald Press. 1983.

Thurman, Judith. Breaking the Mother-Daughter Code: An Interview with Nancy Chodorow. *MS* 11 (3): 34-38, 138-139. September 1982.

Letters to the Editor

I work as an intern at the office of NISBCO in Washington and there it was that I saw your *Report* No. 61 about women's development.

It was very exciting and interesting to hear about new developments of women's theories in scientific fields and as a woman myself, I am glad to realize that my views and feelings about different things are not abnormal and inferior but just female.

As a German exchange student I will go back to my home country at the end of September. I would appreciate it if you could send me the upcoming *Reports*.—*Myriam Gellner, Frankfurt, West Germany.*

The *Report* has been meaningful to me and the three most important women in my life: my wife, my daughter and my daughter-in-law. Of special interest is *Report* No. 61, May-June 1985 (on theories of women's development).

In my classes (in education and educational psychology), we discuss "stage" theories and the research of Kohlberg and Gilligan. I will be pleased to add the work of Krall and Guengerich. —*Elias H. Wiebe, Ed.D., Fresno Pacific College, Fresno, Calif.*

I just finished reading the back issues of *Report* and was impressed with the quality of the early 1985 issue on Black women prepared by Joy Lovett. I would be very interested in using copies of this *Report* in the Women/Men course that I am teaching this fall. —*Gayle Gerber Koontz, Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries, Elkhart, Ind.*

I've enjoyed very much the few issues of *Report* that I've read. Please add me to your mailing list so I can become a regular reader. —*Debbie Shank Miller, Seattle, Wash.*

News and Verbs

"As a woman I found Forum 85 an overwhelming religious experience. To gather together with women from all over the world—representing so many diverse cultures, ideologies, traditions and religions—was a rare privilege. And to listen in solidarity to their stories and struggles was an amazing grace, draining and fulfilling, confusing and enlightening."

Mary Rachel Tanney, MCC Sudan, attended the Non-Governmental Organizations' Women's Conference July 10-19 in Nairobi, Kenya with two of her African co-workers from the Sudan Council of Churches. The forum was held parallel with the United Nations world conference to review and appraise the achievements of the U.N. Decade for Women.

Anyone wishing to receive Mary's full eight-page report is invited to request it of *Report* editor Emily Will.

We love MCC! We believe the Lord has called MCC into being to bring help and healing and salvation to the sick and suffering in this world. We have always supported MCC, and more recently our children have served under MCC in Nepal. We have often admired MCC workers for going out to where the going is tough, because of the love the Lord has put in their hearts for people. We want to continue to support MCC.

But the last issue of *Report* (on body image) causes us some grave concerns about MCC. We do not approve that even a small portion of our offerings, many of which are given sacrificially, are given for such a publication.

I refer specifically to the poem by Carrie Doehring in the Nov.-Dec. 1984 issue. I feel betrayed by MCC, and by these women who supposedly are so concerned about our bodies. We decry the methods the world uses in exploiting women's bodies, and here it is done in "poetry." It seems MCC should have its hands so full with world needs now, that the few disgruntled women who are always searching for issues to parade could find some other means of supporting their occupation. In all these years I have only found one of the *Reports* worth keeping.

Please take my name off the mailing list. We do want to continue to support MCC, both in prayer and financially. God bless your worldwide ministry. —*Mary Derksen, Oita Ken, Japan.*

P.S. The nude would have been offensive, but I believe the poem was even more so. We love our bodies too much to be paraded before the public!

I would like to subscribe to your bimonthly *Report*, and have enclosed a contribution to aid you in your endeavors. I have one question to ask: Do these endeavors extend beyond this publication? If so, what other activities does your committee participate in?

To date, the information which I have received from your *Report* has been of great interest to me. I perceive it as an important voice, in the Mennonite church specifically, and applaud your efforts. Keep up the good work. —*Greg Cressman, New Hamburg, Ont.*

Goshen College has three faculty openings: professor in the division of Bible, religion and philosophy; broadcasting professor and general manager of WGCS-FM; and director of information services. For details, contact Stuart W. Showalter, Goshen College, Goshen, Ind. 46526; (219) 533-3161.

Helen Reusser's August 25 ordination was well attended by friends and acquaintances who have known her throughout her many years of service to the church. The ordination formally recognized Helen's co-pastoring role with her husband, Jim, of Manheim Mennonite Church located on the outskirts of Kitchener, Ont.

In addition to her pastoring, Helen is education consultant for the Mennonite Conference of Ontario and Quebec.

Anne Stuckey served as chair of the worship committee and as a worship leader at Ames 85, the biennial convention of the Mennonite Church.

When the Southeast Iowa MCC Alumni met for a retreat in early September, **Dorothy Friesen** of the Chicago-based organization, Synapses, spoke on the Philippines and lead a workshop on integrating MCC experience into local churches.

Nancy Kerr, in her final year of studies at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries, has been affirmed as one of two teaching elders at Assembly Mennonite Church in Goshen, Ind.

Women can be effective allies in African reforestation efforts, reports MCCer **Wayne Teel**. Teel, who has worked with women's community groups in Kenya, says women there are interested in specific kinds of trees. They especially desire to grow trees that bear fruits or seeds to supplement their children's diets. And for firewood, they need small trees that can be grown close to home and can be harvested with the panga, a machete that women use.

Every woman who can plant trees close to home means one less family cutting down forests, Teel related, as well as help with what can be a very time-consuming chore. Some Kenyan women spend up to four hours every other day looking for fuelwood.

On June 30, the Rev. Maria Alma Copeland became the **first black woman to be ordained in the American Lutheran Church**. She will pastor Fellowship Lutheran Church in Jacksonville, Fla.

Mary Jane Eby of Millersburg, Ohio is the interim youth staffperson for the Ohio Conference of the Mennonite Church.

Nine women were elected to committee and board positions of the Mennonite Church at the denomination's biennial convention in Ames, Iowa this summer. They include: **Doris Gascho**, Kitchener, Ont., **Lois Kenagy**, Corvallis, Ore., **Miriam Book**, Ronks, Pa., all on the nominating committee; **Ruth Lapp Guengerich**, Hesston, Kan. to the Council on Faith, Life and Strategy; **Shirley Buckwalter Yoder**, Goshen, Ind., to the Mennonite Mutual Aid Board; **Patricia Hershberger**, Woodburn, Ore., Mennonite Board of Congregational Ministries; **Helen Lapp**, Lansdale, Pa., Mennonite Board of Education; **Bertha Beachy**, Goshen, Ind., Mennonite Board of Missions; and **Elizabeth Soto**, Elkhart, Ind. Mennonite Publication Board.

Gayle Gerber Koontz is serving as acting dean at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries, Elkhart, Ind. for one year beginning this July 1.

The Committee on Women in Leadership Ministries of the Mennonite Church has created a study packet on Women in Leadership Ministries. The packet contains information and resources to be used by individuals and congregations studying this important question. It is available for \$4 from Committee on Women in Leadership Ministries, 528 East Madison St., Lombard, Ill. 60148-3599; telephone (312) 620-7802. Current committee members include **Emma Richards**, **Vernon Leis**, **Levina Huber**, **Willard Swartley** and **Delores Friesen**.

Committee on Women's Concerns member Joan Gerig was among six General Conference Mennonite Church employees arrested June 12 to protest U.S. government aid to the contra forces in Nicaragua. She and others were charged with blocking a door at the U.S. Federal Building in Chicago.

Illustrations in this issue of *Report* should not be reprinted without consent.

REPORT is published bi-monthly by the MCC Committee on Women's Concerns. The committee, formed in 1973, believes that Jesus Christ teaches equality of all persons. It strives to promote this belief through sharing information, concerns and ideas relating to problems and issues which affect the status of women in church and society. Articles and views presented in *REPORT* do not necessarily reflect official positions of the Committee on Women's Concerns. Correspondence should be addressed to Editor Emily Will at MCC, 21 South 12th Street, Akron, PA 17501.

To subscribe or change your address, please send your old address with your new address to: MCC, 21 South 12th Street, Akron, PA 17501. Allow 2-4 weeks for address change. Contributions welcome.

MCC

Mennonite
Central
Committee

21 South 12th Street
Akron
Pennsylvania
U.S.A.
17501

**Address
correction
requested**



2nd Class
U.S. Postage
PAID
Akron, PA 17501